

Sunday, August 15, 1965
[Monroeville, Pa.-- from my mother]

Dear Dick and Tom,

This is a combined letter to you from your combined parents. We sure do miss you both, but are intrigued with all you are accomplishing and experiencing....

[Snip]

Dick's report read like a cliff-hanger with so much excitement that I actually felt that I had to jam on the brakes at the page-turning at the close of page 7; I knew that was how many pages there were, but I was reading to Dad and we were so carried away trying to follow events on the Nathan Road topographical and house plan that we had constructed from Dick's descriptions that we were over the cliff before we realized that page 8 was -- we hope -- born but not yet sent....

[Snip]

I spoke to Jim about trying to fund-raise for Columbia FDP project, but apparently fund-raising got out of hand last year. And this year they decided to forswear any possibilities of a repeat of some of last year's "selfishness" by not having any fund-raising except as planned through the sale of buttons, etc. Jim assures me that SNCC will get a share, and that this should perk through to Columbia; but I suspect it might not arrive till after present needs cease.

In case we missed contacting Dick tonight, I would like to say very strongly for both Dad and me that we do not want you to stay on the project all alone; it is unwise, to say the least, to tempt people already ill with fear and insecurity, as the rednecks are in many cases. Your own safety, Dick, means far more than whatever guilt or fears such alone stand might assuage, and whatever concern and fear we feel for you; in this instance, your own safety is hostage to the Negro community in Colombia -- and elsewhere -- for the crucial importance is to live for a cause and to invite the constructive responses in the total community; after all, sooner or later you will have to leave, and it is the residue that counts. Contexts define irresponsibility and heroism, and it is a fine line indeed that may separate the two. If you are deeply committed to human rights, you have your whole immediate future quite cut out for you wherever you are; don't get the name of being a "target" (which you will be anyway) -- a "provocateur" -- but rather leave an afterimage of dependability and solidity; this is perhaps the best gift a white person can give in a situation all too prone to flamboyance. I suspect that in all peoples' movements, the real heroes are those who endure and so give the movement its continuity -- and I also suspect that in countless thousands of Negro homes, these people exist; it is no small accomplishment to learn courage from them (and keep your head down). There is no excuse for too much advice -- but always there is excuse for adding other considerations to the alternatives of importance facing someone much admired and cared for.

[Snip]

[For the complete set of my Mississippi 1964-65 letters, see
<http://dickatlee.com/issues/mississippi>]